

Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Little Pied Cormorant

Photo – Noel Young

Birding (instead of painting) on Bettowynd Creek Rita Mills

I was supposed to be doing an exercise in watercolour to capture the reflections and ripples in the creek. I was quietly sitting on my chair in the mud, under a willow, when I became aware of a flock of birds arriving at the other side of the narrow stream to bathe. Several more arrived in the next couple of minutes. I had been able to go on painting when there was just the Willie Wagtails and a couple of White-bellied Cuckoo-shrikes around, but the sight of about twenty Double-barred Finches, several Red-browed Finches, including juveniles, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Thornbills, White-plumed Honeyeaters, a couple of Grey Fantails, the three Willie Wagtails (which spent most of their time chasing each other) and a couple of others I can't remember, was just too much for my concentration. It was such a thrill on that lovely clear morning to watch these dainty birds. Because I was so still they just ignored me and went about their business as if there was no one around, often flying up into the hanging branches of the willow just a few feet in front of me to dry off and preen.

Where's Bettowynd Creek? In the Araluen Valley. Where's that? South of Braidwood, NSW, south east of Canberra. It is really is a beautiful valley with just a small community, some living in the village, some on farms and orchards. In gold rush days it was a very large community, but now it is just a small, friendly, caring community, proud of their valley and heritage. We met several of them at the workshop, others when they came into the local pub, where we were staying, after they'd finished work for the day. I hope to go back for another workshop next year.

Flinders Island --- A Flying Visit

Part two

George Broadway

Next morning it was off down to Trousers Point Beach, spectacular coastal scenery, especially with the sea whipped up into white crests by the wind, of which there was no shortage.

Some older members may remember Alan Reid speaking to the club on more than one occasion, now a few years ago. There was also a club outing to his property up in the Yarra Valley. He now lives on Flinders Island, so on our arrival I contacted him and he suggested that we should meet and that he would take us for a walk around part of the coast. So that afternoon we enjoyed an interesting walk in his company as he took us around the headland from near our house to Trousers Point beach, along the way pointing out aboriginal gnamma holes and White-breasted Sea Eagles. At the conclusion of the walk was the afternoon tea which Alan had deposited earlier. As we walked home we encountered a honey coloured echidna which was a bit of a surprise. Alan told us later that there are six colour variants on the island. That night, barbecued wallaby sausages again, from the Whitemark butcher.



The following day the weather was not very good. We drove down to Lady Barron at the southerly tip of the island. Here there is a Pub, a supermarket, and several houses. This is also the port where ship-born cargo is unloaded. A short distance away looms Cape Barren Island, Cameron Inlet and the Patriarchs, a number of granite peaks. Alan had told us of Red-necked Stints being seen on Logan Lagoon. When we arrived we found plenty of birds, but at some distance, with a mountainous sea raging on the outer side of the sandbar. So it was on to the

Patriarchs where a generous soul had built an A frame shelter for the benefit of walkers, birdwatchers, etc. It would have been a fairly comfortable place to set up camp, with stove, fridge, sink, toilets, etc. There were several permanent residents there to greet us on our arrival; a number of red-necked wallabies and two ducks of doubtful species. Signs requested visitors to not feed the wildlife with scraps, but there was a large bin with appropriate food . So the wildlife enjoyed our visit.

Unfortunately the weather had become rather damp, so our walk was curtailed and it was more less back to our lodgings. Driving up the centre of the island, I felt that we could have been driving through the western district of Victoria or the Mornington Peninsula, the farming country was so similar, with rows of cypress and pine, and paddocks full of sheep or (mostly) Angus cattle.

Alan had offered to lead us on a walk on Mt Strzlecki, but this was cancelled because of the inclement weather. Instead he invited us to his house for afternoon tea, provided for us by wife Wendy. It was very interesting to see the house which was designed by one of his sons, considering all environmental factors, and featuring a Finnish type stove in the centre which warms the house using the minimum amount of wood fuel.

Despite the fact that she was preparing a dinner for house guests, Wendy produced some delicious muffins, which were much appreciated. Afterwards Alan showed us his vegetable garden and orchard, completely fenced and netted to foil marauding wildlife. Tony Morton and John Landy had been to the island a couple of weeks prior, looking for a rare localised butterfly, but without success. Tony asked me to keep a lookout for it but the only ones I saw were of the common variety. However Alan when he saw the photo, said that they were often plentiful in his area, Tony and John had been just a bit too early. Incidentally, Alan's son John, who with his wife Thais lives just around the corner in Castlemaine, is the proprietor of the Redbeard Bakery in Trentham.

That night being our last on the island we booked in at the local restaurant where we enjoyed some local produce although the beef had come from as far away as Tasmania.

We had a bird list for the island, but scored a very small percentage. Sightings included :-

Brown Quail Pheasant Crested Tern White-breasted Sea Eagle

Sooty Oystercatcher Hooded Dotterel Brown Scrub-wren

Dusky Robin Rufous Fantail Black Currawong Green Rosellas

- Plus a number of others which one sees around here on a regular basis.

Carol Hall and 'a touch of ice'

Noel Young

At the last meeting the much travelled Carol Hall treated us to a well prepared and presented talk on her recent journey to Spitsbergen and Greenland in 2010. At the port town on Svalbard she learned the rules about living with the presence of Polar Bears; if venturing beyond the town boundaries you must take a rifle! As they tend to sneak in at night, trip wires placed in strategic locations set off alarms.

She set out on an ice-breaker, the “Polar Pioneer” which carried Zodiacs to ferry the adventurous to shore or amongst the pack ice. From one of these she bagged some remarkable photographs of a mother bear with two cubs. They are curious, and ventured to the edge of the ice to stare back at the tourists. With climate change causing the rapid retreat of minimum sea ice in summer, there is some concern about the future of the bears. Carol points out that they have survived over 200 thousand years of fluctuating temperatures during the ice ages, but as their principal source of rich food is in the ocean and their method of hunting is from ice platforms, ice retreat means they are confined to the land for longer and are getting hungrier.

We were then shown pictures of Puffins and Guillemots, and learned that the latter nest on precarious ledges, but have evolved an egg with a pointed shape, making it difficult to roll off.

Where the land is clear of ice, it is in the form of tundra – a boggy and mossy vegetation with a variety of very small flowering plants including Saxifrage and Arctic Bell-heather, this sub-Arctic ecosystem is represented mainly across northern Russia as an undulating topography overlying permafrost (which has been thawing for over 50 years)

Pictures of the ruins of a whaling station were evidence of the long history of this industry on Spitsbergen.

With suitable photos Carol explained how the almost universal retreat of glaciers has resulted in an increase in moraine and associated dust. Though some glaciers still reach the sea, where shelf and sea ice has vanished the glaciers have been found to “surge” - that is, they accelerate at times to higher speeds. The underside of sea and shelf ice provides a substrate for abundant algae which fuel the traditionally rich food chain of the Arctic waters, all the way up to the seals and whales.

The rest of the journey in Spitsbergen included shots of Ivory Gulls, Kittiwakes, Black Guillemot, Arctic Terns and Walrus.

From Spitsbergen Carol proceeded to the east coast of Greenland, where she outlined the features of this very large, mostly snow covered island; the Musk Ox, and the people who are forging an independent existence from their former allegiance to Denmark, to some intriguing geological features, like the red sandstone cliffs shot through with patterns of dark basaltic dykes from a later intrusion, and a recently active basalt area with hot springs. This geological activity is thought to be associated with the mid-Atlantic rift, of which Iceland is a surface expression.

Our thanks were expressed to Carol for a very informative and entertaining evening.

Another reminder that club subscriptions are now due

There are still some outstanding - please check that you are currently financial

Bird Names

Chris Timewell

A couple of years ago I wrote an article for the Castlemaine Naturalist which highlighted differences between the common names provided in the 'Birds of the Castlemaine District' brochure and the then recently revised list of Official Australian Bird Names. An article in the next issue of the Castlemaine Naturalist by another club member made a valuable and thought-provoking response when raising concerns about the loss of local variation and diversity of language as a result of organizations or governments designating which words can and cannot be used.

Since this time, I've read a great book by Libby Robin, *The Flight of the Emu: A Hundred Years of Australian Ornithology 1901-2001*. Chapter 3 of this book, 'What's in a name?' describes the challenging process that Australian ornithologists went through in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century to agree upon a single list of Australian birds, including both standard common English language names and Latinized scientific names. Around particular issues, this debate continues through to the present day.

With the exception of taxonomists, most ecologists, birdwatchers and the general public refer to birds by their common names rather than their Latin scientific names. As such, I think there are a number of compelling reasons why scientific papers and reports, and also conservation programs (e.g. bird atlassing) should have a standard set of common bird names to use. The alternative would lead to confusing scenarios and potentially distort the data and conclusions. For example:

1. Too many names become confusing. I have read of an example where the same species was given 14 different common names in the same region of a single state. It would become very difficult for scientists and researchers to analyze data accurately and efficiently with multiple name variations for each species to be considered.
2. There are occasions where two or more species are given the same common name by the public. For example, Robin Red Breast seems to be a name commonly given to at least three different species (Scarlet, Flame and Red-capped Robins). Seeing the name 'Robin Red-breast' on a species list for central Victoria would not help identify which species is being referred to. I'm sure that there are other examples as well.

However, I also have a soft spot for the many bird name variations. I'll often use them myself in conversation – 'Bifcus' for the Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike and 'Whoopee' for the White-plumed Honeyeater. Intriguingly titled, "The Illustrated Dictionary of Australian Birds by Common Name" (by J. D. McDonald in 1987) includes over 3000 documented examples of different common English names used for Australian birds. This does not include the various aboriginal names for Australian birds which must also be in the hundreds or even thousands across the various languages of the continent.

Below are some of my favorites from the bird name dictionary. Can you guess

which local species the following bird names referred to? The answers will be provided in the June Castlemaine Naturalist.

- Baldyhead
- Chattering Bee-eater
- Fiery Parakeet
- Fairy Owl (and also called Crested Goatsucker!)
- Green Grackle
- Leaden Bell-magpie
- Happy Jack
- Ha-ha Pigeon
- Hell-diver
- Spotted Diamond-bird
- Yellow Whiskers
- What's-o'clock
- Roseate Cockatoo
- Australian Flowerpecker
- Doodle-doo

Field Trip to Walmer bush blocks, April 14

Rita Mills



The Club is undertaking a survey of a number of small nature reserves within the district, and Kit Morris has been working for some time on a satisfactory sheet that will give an idea of the health of the reserve visited, without making it a difficult task. We don't intend, at this stage anyway, to do detailed surveys of species present, or use the system of quadrats, which some members of the club are undertaking independently, and enjoying.

On Saturday the 14th we looked at three reserves in the Walmer area, to help refine the grid that Kit has been working on. One reserve we looked at last August when there were flowers, birds and a kangaroo. The next one I can't remember checking before, and the third, in Ottrey's scrub area, I hadn't visited for about 20 years, perhaps longer. (It was a shock – it's full of houses now!)

Each area was slightly different – more Stringy Barks in one, lots of understory in

another, few birds in any, but at least there were several, including a male Scarlet and a male Flame Robin within just a few metres of each other at the third...

One thing we did decide – Autumn is not the ideal time to conduct one of these surveys! Perhaps we should try again in late winter through to late spring?

Next meeting: **Birding in Maluku with Stuart Dashper**

Maluku or the Moluccas is a distinct bio-geographic region of eastern Indonesia that has over one hundred currently recognized endemic bird species. It was in this region, on the island of Ternate, that Alfred Russell Wallace formulated his theory of evolution by natural selection in 1858. As such these islands have some interesting parallels to the Galapagos Islands. However the lack of infrastructure, recent ethnic/religious strife and remoteness has resulted in them rarely being visited by ornithologists and birdwatchers.

Join us for a tour of these fascinating islands and their avifauna, including the bizarre Wallace's Standardwing Bird of Paradise, the beautiful Seram Cockatoo, Lazuli Kingfisher and Ivory-breasted Pitta. Stuart has spent as much of his free time as possible in the last two decades travelling to the islands of the world, and especially Asia, in search of rare and unusual birds.

Observations

- ◆ Gold-dust acacia and Gorse bitter-pea in flower, large flock of Pied Currawongs near home and Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos at Kyneton golf course – George Broadway
- ◆ Late April had four Eastern Spinebills in the Emu-bush – Rita Mills
- ◆ Two Eastern Spinebills working potted Eremophilas and Correas under the verandah, Silvereyes feasting on Kangaroo apple fruit, Red browed Finches gleaning small critters off the branches of a Wirilda Wattle and a small Kangaroo apple. A small bat working moths off a window one night, two Grey Fantails having a real 'stoush' in the back garden (more 'spring' confusion perhaps?) and second sighting in three weeks of a Black Wallaby on Merrifield St. – Denis Hurley
- ◆ New Holland Honeyeaters with young in a nest 2m. above the door – Ern Perkins
- ◆ Tawny Frogmouth with two young seen late March – Helen Morris
- ◆ King Parrots dining on the fruit trees in the garden (Gisborne) – Joy Weatherill

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

May 2012

Fri May 11 meeting: speaker STUART DASHPER: Birds of Maluku

Sat May 12 field trip: Saltwater track (Taradale)

Fri June 8 meeting: speaker DAVID MILLSOM

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 7.30 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2012

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2012 Committee

Rita Mills (President)		5472 4553
George Broadway (Secretary)	georgebroadway@bigpond.com	5472 2513
Nigel Harland (Treasurer)	5474 8246	Chris Morris 0418 996 289
Richard Piesse	0448 572 867	Chris Timewell 5472 1553
Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345	

[email newsletter material to: noel.young@optusnet.com.au]

**Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc. PO Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.
Inc #A0003010B**